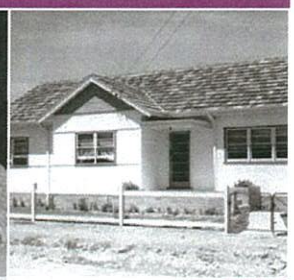
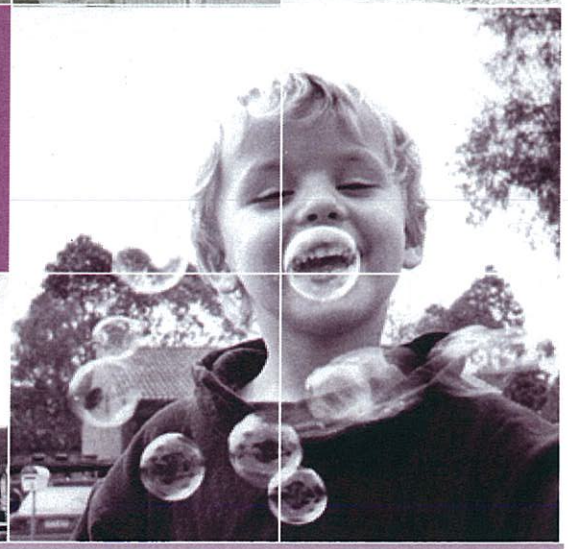
celebrating

60 years

of homes for the people





NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

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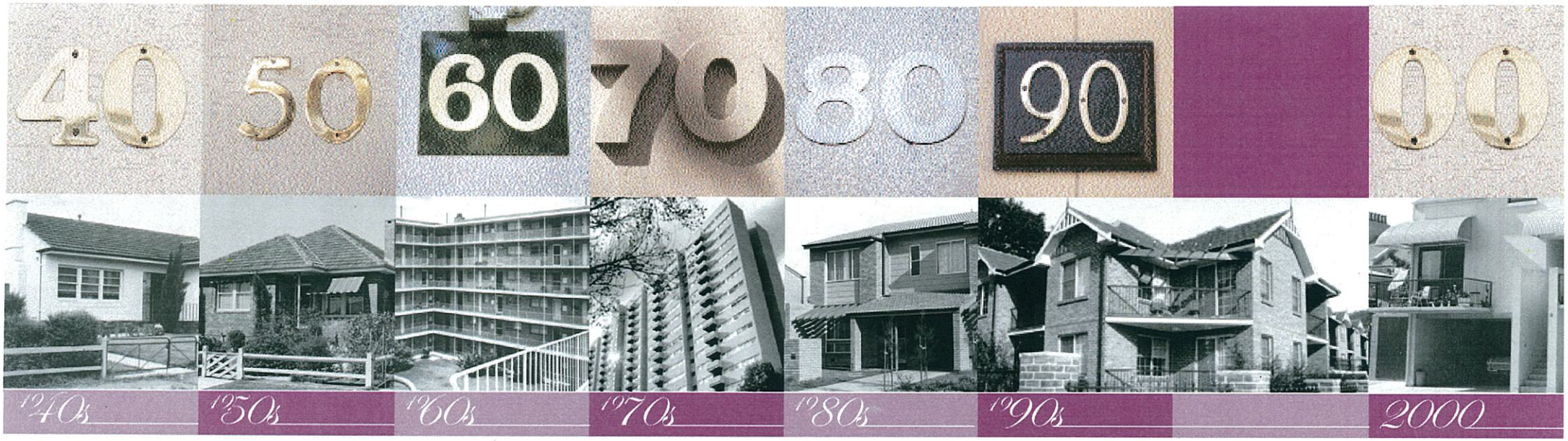
OVERVIEW



1940s

- First Commonwealth State Housing Agreement created.
- 80,000 families urgently in need of housing.
- More than 12,000 homes built, with a further 10,000 either in development or in planning stages.

1950s

- Housing Commission becomes a pioneer developer.
- First planned neighbourhood estate of between 200 and 2,000 detached and semi-detached houses with amenities such as shops, schools and hospitals built at Orphan School Creek in Canley Vale.
- Housing Commission developments commenced in Ryde, Villawood, Maroubra, Seven Hills, Ermington, Rydalmere, Dundas Valley, Windale (Newcastle), Unanderra and Berkeley (Wollongong).
- 50,000 new homes built.

1960s

- Sydney's first high-rise apartments, Redfern's John Northcott Place and William McKell Place, appear on the Sydney skyline.
- Housing Commission starts building its largest ever estate – Green Valley, to house 25,000 people in 6,000 new properties The initial 940 dwellings were based on the American 'Radburn' model.
- Mount Druitt surpasses Green Valley as the largest new suburb ever built, with a population of 32,000 people housed in 8,000 new properties.
- Townhouses used on estates for the first time rather than cottages – a medium density solution to reduce urban sprawl.
- More flats were built in Sydney than cottages for the first time.

1970s

- The Housing Commission completed its 100,000th property.
- Smaller scale estates of mixed cottage and town houses located in Macquarie Fields, Minto, Claymore and Airds.
- The townhouse used as the main housing type on a scale not previously seen in Australia.

1980s

- Housing priorities re-focused, away from just public housing as 'blue-collar' workers' housing to housing those most in need.
- Nuclear working-class family no longer typical applicants. Growing numbers of single people, including sole parents, the homeless, older people and people with disabilities applying for public housing.
- Over 150,000 homes now built, with more than 270,000 people assisted to buy homes.
- Housing Commission becomes the NSW Department of Housing.
- New emphasis placed on rehabilitation of old housing stock.
- Landcom created to ensure timely and affordable supply of new home sites.

1990s

- The NSW Department of Housing focuses on public housing following Mant Report.
- The Neighbourhood Improvement Program (later renamed Community Renewal) commences. Refurbishment begins in Airds, Claymore, Minto and Macquarie Fields.
- The Department seeks housing solutions in the private and rental markets using innovations such as headleasing and partnerships with private developers and community housing organisations.
- The stock of community housing doubles.
- The targeting of housing assistance to those in priority need increases in response to continued reduction in Federal funding.
- Major reinvestment in the Department's housing stock with substantial effort to bring stock up to standard.

2000

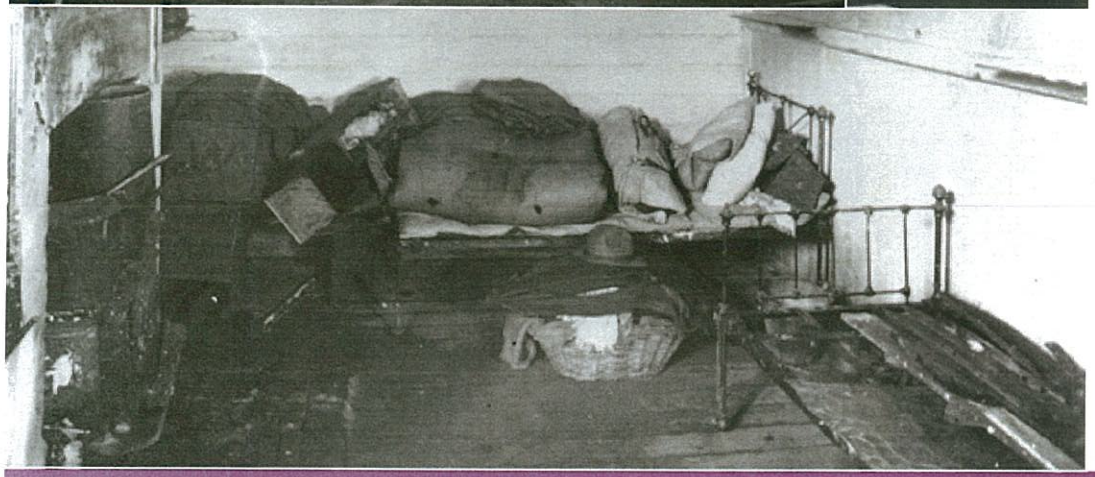
- Capital stock now exceeds 138,000 properties.
- Public housing tenants have an improved quality of life through estate refurbishment, tenant employment and community building initiatives.
- Tenants report generally higher levels of satisfaction with services and the places in which they live.
- A series of major redevelopments of existing housing estates commences.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2002 is the 60th year of public housing in NSW. The Housing Commission was established in 1942 and both it and its modern incarnation, the Department of Housing, have become an integral part of the social, cultural, historical and architectural fabric of post-war Australia.

The initial post-war political ideal of providing everyone with decent and affordable housing presented many social and economic challenges. Successive governments have attempted to solve this by adopting various models that aimed to improve society by creating new physical environments. Each decade of the post-war era has developed its own, distinctive housing style such as the fibro cottage on a quarter acre, the planned neighbourhood, the apartment, the Radburn estate, the high-rise, the townhouse and myriad specialist housing now needed for the ever more complex and diverse needs of modern society. If it is true that the philosophy, social policies, dreams and aspirations of any era are echoed by its architecture then these various housing styles are physical expressions of the ever-changing political policies, cultural philosophies, spatial restrictions, demographics and housing needs of post-war Australia.

Although public housing is commonly associated with the post-war era, the history of public housing in New South Wales goes back to the early 1900s when there were a number of piecemeal attempts to improve housing conditions. During the past sixty years there have been few windows of opportunity, the late 40s, early 50s, mid 70s and 80s being notable exceptions, for the Housing Commission and Department of Housing to fulfil Chifley and McKell's original vision that decent, affordable housing should be available to all Australians. During the periods when funding and materials have been available the Department has proved an effective agent of change, willing to innovate, experiment and offer solutions to one of modern Australia's ongoing challenges - providing shelter to all who need it. This brief history is an attempt to summarise the ebb and flow of the history of public housing.



1788 to 1942

When Captain Arthur Phillip established the first European colony at Port Jackson in 1788 there were no established patterns of settlement and no permanent structures. On naming it Sydney, Phillip vowed that the new colony would never be allowed to degenerate into the urban squalor they had left behind in England. However, the early Governors, with Lachlan Macquarie a notable exception, allowed Sydney to grow haphazardly, especially after the 1851 gold rush, which attracted the first big wave of voluntary immigrants. Phillip's worst fears were realised before Australia had celebrated its centenary. There was squalor and poor quality housing around the harbour areas and shantytowns of self-built homes had sprung up to accommodate the population overspill with no planning or foresight.

Although numerous council, church and welfare reports commented on the squalid conditions that many working people were forced to endure, it took an outbreak of bubonic plague at the turn of the 20th century to force the government to intervene in the housing market for the first time. The New South Wales government renewed affected properties at Millers Point, Sydney, where the plague first struck, and the Sydney Harbour Trust built terraces for waterside workers. However, this housing assistance was aimed at specific groups of workers, not the general public.

Nonetheless, the Housing Board was established in 1912 and a Royal Commission into housing concluded that private developers were not satisfying the demand for accommodation and feudal-style landlords were keeping working people in appalling conditions. The Housing Board was given a brief to build good quality, affordable housing for the workers, but its ambitious program to build 1,437 houses was never realised. The public housing experiment ended when the Housing Board was dismantled in 1924 with only 315 cottages built in Dacey Gardens based on the British 'garden-city' model.

During the remaining inter-war years, the already dire housing situation was allowed to deteriorate further. Private investment in housing fell as a result of the 'Great Depression' and rent controls were introduced during the crisis. The government tried to encourage the 'Aussie Dream' of private home ownership through loans from the Government Savings Bank, but with unemployment rife there were few takers. More successful was the Homes for the Unemployed Trust which lent money for do-it-yourself builders or repairs to existing properties. This money was used to construct basic housing and squatter settlements such as Happy Valley, last seen during the gold rush a century before.

In 1936 the Housing Improvement Board continued the piecemeal experiments of the recent past by building 56 flats in Erskineville. Its report reiterated the findings of the 1913 Royal Commission, which concluded that the private sector could not be relied on to provide housing and called for the state to intervene. The call again fell on deaf ears. The political will to intervene in housing did not yet exist at either State or Federal level. However, the looming conflict that became World War 2 would change the political landscape and redefine the role of the state.

Neighbourhood planning – 1940s and 1950s

Ideas about the role of the state and social welfare changed when John Curtin became Prime Minister in 1941. One of his key election promises concerned housing. Ben Chifley was appointed Minister of State for post-war reconstruction and with the help of New South Wales Premier, William McKell, put a number of key social reforms in place, including the passing of the Housing Act in 1941 and the establishment of the Housing Commission in 1942. Of all his social welfare reforms, which included workers' compensation, miners' pensions and consumer protection laws, McKell regarded the Housing Commission as his greatest achievement. Its aim was simply expressed by James McGirr, the first ever Minister for Housing in NSW, *"... to build a comfortable, well-appointed dwelling for every family in the community is well within the compass of this country's resources and capacity."*

However, hamstrung by the lack of labour and materials, the new Housing Commission had to content itself with building emergency housing for returned servicemen. But all that changed in the aftermath of World War 2 as the winds of social change blew through Australia and the rest of the western world. After six grim years of war it was time for the visionaries to step forward. Buoyed by popular support and a new-found optimism in the future it was time to build a new society – a better, more caring, less exclusive society in which everyone was provided for according to their needs. The task of post-war governments was, as Sir William Beveridge, the architect of Britain's 'welfare state' said, to eradicate the *"five great [social] evils... Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness"*.

The Housing Commission's main task was to rid New South Wales of the squalid housing conditions that had been remarked upon since the turn of the century, but never properly addressed. The Housing Commission Report of 1946 outlined the scale of the housing problem it had inherited. It picked up where previous reports had left off, painting a none too flattering picture of rising damp, cramped rooms, poor lighting and inadequate sanitation. It concluded that the 'Great Depression' and the two World Wars had effectively robbed New South Wales of two decades of investment in housing. A post-war 'baby boom' and a flood of new European immigrants further exacerbated the pre-war housing shortage. It warned that over 30,000 properties could be classified as seriously rundown, and that 80,000 families urgently needed housing. An estimated 250,000-300,000 properties were needed to cover the housing shortfall – a tall order by any standards.

As an interim measure the Housing Commission created a network of Community Housing Centres (CHC) for the most needy cases, using a wide array of former Defence Department buildings, and promised to commit 90% of all new housing to CHC residents.

But post-war shortages of labour and building materials again threatened to prevent the urgently needed home building program getting underway. However, the Housing Commission showed itself to be as resourceful as it was far-sighted. It established an outpost in London to buy and export baths, toilets, piping, guttering and any other building or furniture supplies that were in short supply in Australia. It even persuaded four British firms producing prefabricated fibro homes to

Neighbourhood planning – 1940s and 1950s

relocate to New South Wales to exclusively service the Housing Commission. Fibro sheeting was identified as a cheap alternative to weatherboard and much of the 200,000 private and public housing stock built in New South Wales during the 1940s and 50s were built using this material.

Despite the many difficulties it faced, the 10,000th public housing tenant took up residence in the Kingsgrove suburb of Sydney in 1949. In fact, between 1943 and the end of 1949 the Housing Commission managed to build 12,335 homes and had a further 10,000 either in the building or planning stages. So desperate were people for homes that the new houses had to be allocated by ballot to avoid civil unrest and some even moved into the shells of their new homes before they were completed.

Chifley had also brokered the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement in 1945, which pumped Federal capital into state housing projects on an annual basis. A budget was negotiated each year to subsidise the cost of home building, provide 3% loans repayable over 45 years to its working class tenants through the state-owned Rural bank and fund a concessional rent scheme designed to help low-income earners afford their Housing Commission rent.

The Housing Commission soon realised that its responsibilities extended beyond mere bricks and mortar. As a landlord taking millions of pounds in rent per year it had to employ a team of housing workers to collect payment from tenants, provide help and advice, assess new applications and undertake all other manner of social and administrative duties. It soon also found itself part of the government's economic planning policy. Houses were built at Muswellbrook to support the opening of a new open cast pit and at Newcastle and Wollongong to support new steel industry projects.

Given the pressing demand for homes, the Housing Commission began looking at building larger scale estates on farmland on Sydney's outskirts. Through the development of these new housing estates it became a pioneer developer. The Housing Commission began this bold experiment with the declared intention of applying modern town planning practices wherever possible. The first planned neighbourhood was built in 1951 at Orphan School Creek in Canley Vale near Cabramatta in Sydney's south-west. It was based on the earlier Daceyville 'garden city' model and was to consist of between 200 and 2000 detached and semi-detached houses. They were built to certain specifications in order to reassure the public that the new public housing was not inferior in any way to private developments. With a full range of modern appliances and inside toilets, they compared very favourably to anything the private market had to offer. Their specifications would certainly be regarded as very generous by present day standards. Their features included:

- allotments of 6,000 square feet minimum (556m sq)
- minimum frontage of 50ft (15.2m)
- minimum distance between house of 14 ft (4.3m)
- only 20% of the site would be built on

The so-called 'golden era' came to an end in 1952 as a result of rampant inflation and the election of Robert Menzies, who reduced the amount of capital being pumped into public housing through the Commonwealth Housing Agreement. The expansive

Neighbourhood planning – 1940s and 1950s

home building program which had, at last, fulfilled the spirit of the original 1912 Housing Board by spending some £34m to house some 108,000 people was curtailed. The Housing Commission would still continue to address the housing crisis, albeit at a more modest rate. The great private post-war housing boom had not materialised and the Housing Commission had become the sole investor in new rental housing.

Even given its reduced circumstances, the Housing Commission was still involved in opening up and developing large new residential areas in western Sydney, which was still predominantly rural. More neighbourhood estates, which became the planning theme of the 1950s, sprang up in Ryde, Villawood, Maroubra and Seven Hills. As the decade progressed, the Housing Commission expanded the neighbourhood estate scheme on a scale never previously attempted in New South Wales. These were not just homes, but whole communities complete with amenities such as schools, hospitals and shops. Early examples included Ermington, Rydalmere, Dundas Valley, Windale (Newcastle) and Unanderra and Berkeley (Wollongong). The Seven Hills project in western Sydney was seen as the first stage of a satellite town for Blacktown.

A survey of tenants conducted between September 1954 and June 1955 revealed that 20-30 year-olds were the largest demographic group in public housing. Nearly all were married and single parent families were almost unknown.

Married with no children	20.2%
Married with one child	29.2%
Married with two children	22.7%
Married with three children	12.4%

Occupations revealed the following pattern:

Unskilled	52.8%
Tradesmen	19.4%
Pensioners/Unemployed	9.1%
Clerical	6.7%
Professional	2.5%
Domestics	2.3%
Teachers	1.0%
Police	0.8%
Clergy	0.1%

By the end of the 1950s the Housing Commission had redrawn the map of Sydney. New suburbs had been created on its outskirts and it had created housing schemes on all points of the compass. It had initiated a building program in the country and in rundown inner city areas like Waterloo and Redfern, where slum clearance was a priority, one to four storey walk-up flats and maisonettes replaced terraces.

'Boom' times had returned after the austerity of the first post-war decade and the new era of consumerism allowed Menzies to revive the 'Great Aussie Dream' of home ownership. It had been part of the original ethos of the pioneer nation, but had been blighted for the past three decades by war and depression. The Menzies Government saw the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement as a means to revive that dream. It started funding home ownership programs for the first time and made allowance for the sale of public housing stock. By the end of the decade the Housing Commission had built almost 50,000 homes – 25% of which had been bought by tenants. Two-thirds of homes built by the Housing Commission in 1959 were for private purchase rather than rental.

Great Estates and High-Rises – 1960s

The 1960s was a decade of profound change and bold statements in both public housing and society in general. The great estates grew out of the Housing Commission's desire to build on the successes of the 1950s. In 1960 it undertook to build its largest ever estate – Green Valley near Liverpool. This vision of modern planning was to accommodate 25,000 people in 6,000 new properties.

It adopted the much-acclaimed American 'Radburn concept' for its final Green Valley suburb Cartwright. Its defining principles were separating, as far as possible, pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Also, unlike the traditional terrace properties, the front of the houses faced away from the street out onto an expanse of communal ground criss-crossed by a network of pathways. This more open, community ideal would dominate public housing planning for the next two decades.

Mount Druitt in Sydney's south-west soon surpassed Green Valley as the largest new suburb ever built with a population of 32,000 housed in 8,000 new properties. It used the townhouse on estates for the first time rather than cottages – a medium density solution to the problem of the diminishing amount of land. The new curvilinear street design and carports outside each home also foreshadowed the coming age of the affordable family car.

Rejuvenation of the inner city houses was ongoing. Land was now at a premium and building upwards was seen as the solution. The time had come for the theories of the French visionary planner Le Corbusier to be put into practice. His futuristic plans created in the 1920s and 30s foresaw people living in high-rise blocks connected by walkways which would create space on the ground for parks, walkways and leisure amenities. Although the Commission had experimented with multi-unit blocks in the 1950s, these so-called high-rises were on a much larger scale. From 1960 onwards, developments like Redfern's John Northcott Place and William McKell Place began to appear on the Sydney skyline.

The promotion of the ideal of home ownership continued throughout the decade. Public housing tenants were encouraged to buy their own properties with a £50 deposit and a loan half to a third cheaper than the commercial bank rate.

The last half of the decade saw new applications for public housing rise by 9% year on year. By 1970 it was noted that an increasing number of the 24,705 people who applied for public housing that year were on very low incomes – 96% earning below the national average of $93.10 per week. However, the applicants showed little demographic change from previous decades. Applicants for public housing were predominantly still married couples with or without children. Sole parents and single people were predominantly ineligible for public housing.

Elderly Singles	11.9%
Elderly Couples	3.55%
Married couples with no children	13.89%
Married couples with two children	37.34%
Married couples with more than two children	33.32%

Corridor Estates – 1970s

Mounting media criticism of the great estates was noted in the 1972 report along with the observation that:

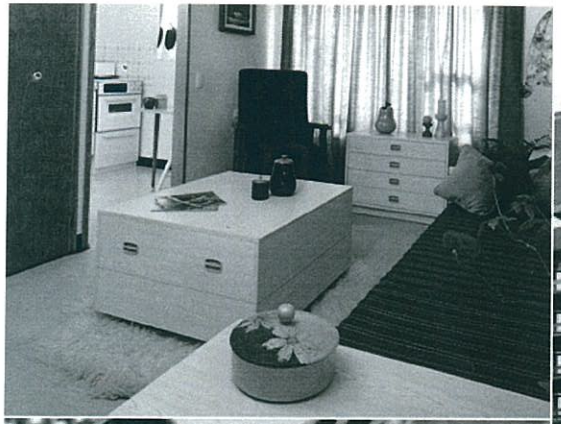
"...The Commission has often of necessity been forced to be the pioneer developer and thus to endure all the difficulties necessarily involved and having to suffer at times unreasonable and insensitive criticisms."

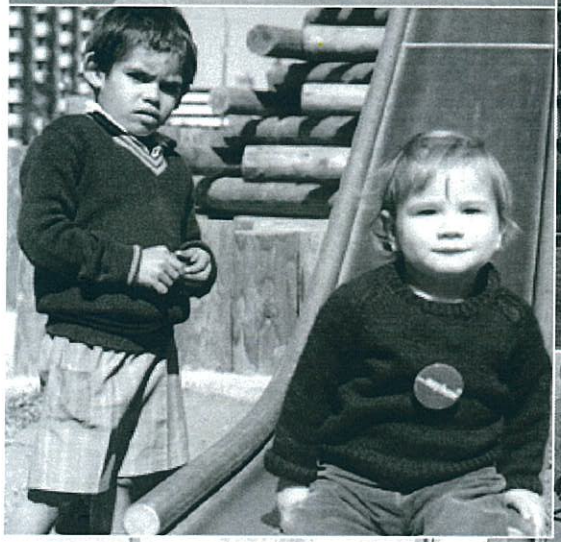
However, that the Housing Commission itself was questioning the policy of building on virgin land on the outskirts of cities reflected a growing realisation that housing was about people, a sense of community, access to services and employment, and not just bricks and mortar. The labour intensive industries that were expected to relocate on the outskirts near the labour pools in the large housing estates had not materialised and as unemployment began to rise it became clear that they never would. The great estates were becoming ghettos of disadvantaged people. It concluded that what was needed was *"... a better sociological mix"*.

This need for greater social parity was also recognised by the newly elected Whitlam government that had just broken almost two decades of Liberal dominance. Elected on a ticket of *"getting involved"*, Whitlam intervened in public housing in an unprecedented manner. By 1972, the year in which the Housing Commission completed its 100,000th dwelling, it had already sold 20,000 or 20% of the total number of properties it had built. At 69% only Iceland enjoyed a higher rate of home ownership than Australia. But Whitlam ended two decades of selling public housing to tenants. In future, the Housing Commission would no longer sell assets it could not replace, particularly in inner city areas.

Social forecasters predicted a huge demand for public housing in the future. They estimated that there would be 162,000 new applicants by 1980, 181,000 by 1990 and as many as 219,000 by 1995-2000. These figures were calculated using projections for immigration, population, availability of private finance, size of family and other external forces. If these predictions were accurate it was reckoned that it would cost $550m to replace the stock it now held which had only cost $126m to build. Given present costs of land and building it reckoned $800m could be saved over the next 30 years by not selling properties that could be redeveloped.

Although the inner city high-rise solution found its ultimate expression in the 1972 royal opening of the Endeavour Estate's two 30 storey twin towers in Redfern, Whitlam's intervention brought the high-rise era to an end. Riding a wave of resident support and aided by the 'green bans' imposed by Jack Mundey's Builders' Labourers Federation, Whitlam refused to fund any more high-rises in Waterloo and initiated a government buy-out of a controversial high-rise development at Woolloomooloo and Glebe. On a social level, it was felt that the Housing Commission needed to be part of the redevelopment process in the inner city





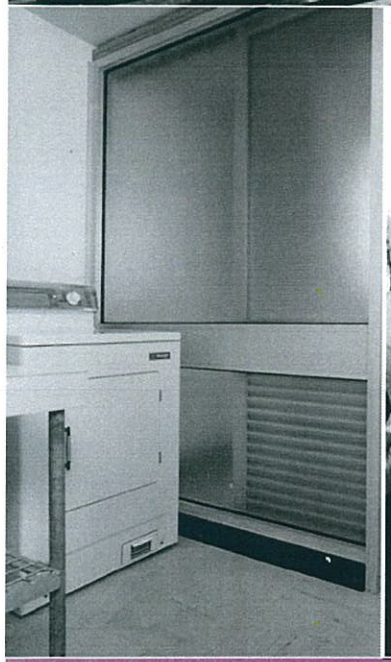
Corridor Estates – 1970s

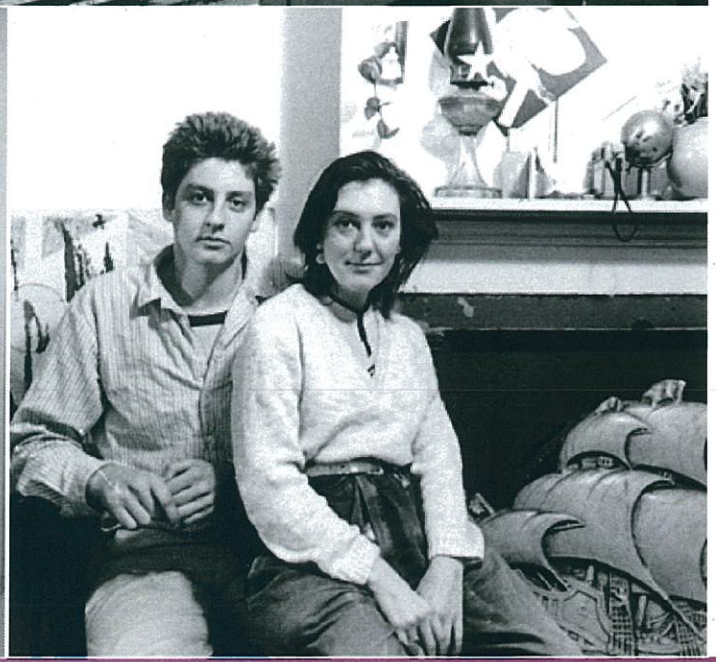
to give the low-income earner equal access to employment, transport and other social amenities. Words like 'renovation' and 'rehabilitation' entered the Housing Commission lexicon as it now looked at low-rise housing solutions, such as acquiring old housing stock in the inner city and replacing older fibro cottage stock with medium density apartments.

The Housing Commission also returned to building smaller-scale estates in the latter half of the 1970s. These 'corridor estates', so-called because they were built along the south-western Liverpool-Campbelltown corridor, included Macquarie Fields, Minto and Airds. Macquarie Fields was the first and the largest and was built on a smaller overall area than previous developments. The cost of land meant that the era of the cottage was all but over except in country areas. For the first time the Housing Commission used the two-storey townhouse as the main housing type, on a scale not previously seen in Australia, as opposed to the low-density cottage-style housing that had been favoured in the outer suburbs since the 1950s. In another first, the new townhouse design was incorporated into the Radburn concept.

As the decade progressed, more new estates in Western and South Western Sydney such as Claymore and Mount Druitt provided housing for another 30,000 people and stretched Sydney's boundaries further south and west. Like the high-rise, the era of the broadacre estate was over and Cranebrook, near Penrith, was the last one to be completed in 1979.

By the end of the 1970s the statistics showed that although the number of public housing tenants in NSW had only increased in the last half of the decade from 61,285 to 70,513, the rent rebate bill had spiralled from only $2m to $31m, largely as a result of the introduction of market rents for public housing properties. It indicated a greater reliance on social security benefits and as the 1980s would prove, this was an early warning that public housing was no longer just for working class families, but for people with ever more complex and housing welfare needs. Other significant social changes included the introduction of a means test for access to public housing, market rents for public housing and the establishment of the first specific Aboriginal housing program.





Micro Estates – 1980s

The economic boom of the 1960s had heralded the introduction of modern manufacturing, new technology and international competition from countries like Taiwan and Japan. This impacted on labour intensive and traditional industries – as it had done on every generation since the industrial revolution. Coupled with a major recession in the early 1980s and the economic rationalisation of the new enterprise economy – unemployment rose to unprecedented levels, which in turn impacted on public housing. Surveys showed that two million men, women and children were living below the poverty line in Australia after they paid their housing costs.

By the early 1980s it was also clear that Australia had undergone a major demographic shift in the post-war era. Economic and social pressures were affecting the new generations of low-income groups differently. The profile of the typical public housing tenant had also changed considerably, as had their needs. In the first three decades after the war the typical tenant had been a nuclear working class family (husband, wife and kids), whereas by the 1980s society had splintered into an array of smaller social groupings such as single mothers, unemployed, homeless and the aged. Statistics showed that of the 26,284 new applicants in 1983 – 47% were still two parent families, but now 18% were lone pensioners and 35% single parent households. The 1983 Housing Commission Report concluded:

"... The long-term dependence on the supply of public housing by so many people is directly related to growing levels of unemployment, to the greater numbers of households dependent on pensions, supporting parents benefit, and other social Security Department assistance, and to the increasing incidence of those seeking refuge from unbearable domestic situations."

'Crisis housing' and 'homelessness' were added to the Housing Commission lexicon and from 1983 it began accepting applications from single people in an effort to refocus its housing priorities, for the first time, to those in greatest need. Public housing continued with a more inclusive policy of housing people with high support needs. In addition, account was taken of the large number of applicants from non-English speaking backgrounds. All of this meant big change for the Housing Commission.

On 1 January 1986, after 44 years, building over 150,000 homes, assisting 270,000 people buy a home and in some way benefiting 33% of the population of New South Wales, the Housing Commission became the Department of Housing. It brought together previously disparate arms of government which had administered public housing, developed land and provided home purchase assistance in an effort to provide greater flexibility in providing housing services and better target housing to specific needs. The Department of Housing's new mission statement, *"To maximise opportunities for everyone in the New South Wales state to have access to safe, affordable, appropriate housing"*, very much reflected the ethos of those changing times, which decreed that public housing should be available to everyone who needed it. As if to underline the point, during its first year of operation the waiting list stood at

Micro Estates – 1980s

55,000 and there were 32,000 new applicants for public housing.

With the deregulation of the Australian and world financial markets there was a growing relationship between the public and the private sectors. The Department of Housing saw an opportunity to provide more housing opportunities by becoming active in all three housing sectors – private ownership, private rentals and public housing rental.

It brokered 'package deals' with private developers – buying properties, mostly flats, off the plan. The Department of Housing also entered into partnerships with community housing organisations to provide shelter for special need groups, and enhanced the range of existing financial products, such as the Rent Assistance Scheme, to enable low-income earners to remain in private rental accommodation or obtain a low cost mortgage. To achieve this the Department of Housing adopted a three-pronged approach. It was aimed at increasing the supply and affordability of land, providing public housing to those who couldn't afford to rent in the private sector and promoting home-ownership to low- and medium-income earners through its Homefund scheme that again reversed policy and encouraged tenants to buy their homes.

This diverse approach produced quick results. The Department of Housing's 1987/88 annual report recorded 50,000 housing opportunities generated in a year in which it received 37,854 new applications – a 15% increase on the previous year.

Architecturally, the 1980s saw a continued emphasis on smaller scale estate developments that again reflected the changing needs of society and growing land pressure in Sydney. The redevelopment of old fibro houses at Villawood/East Fairfield dispensed with the orthodox straight lines of the old cottage and street patterns and attempted to create a more aesthetically pleasing look. All housing was built at an angle to boundary streets, cul-de-sacs were added and, in keeping with the Radburn design of earlier developments, the front of the house faced inwards onto open communal land. There were also pathways and alleys flowing through the development allowing freer access for pedestrians. Private areas were small yards as opposed to the generous gardens allowed for during the building of previous generations of cottages.

The program to rejuvenate the inner city finished. Old terraces, which would previously have been demolished were now renovated. This, in part, reflected sustained public and union opposition to old working class communities being broken up and relocated to new estates. The design and building of the Sirius multi-storey apartment block in the heart of the historic Rocks area was controversial, but by housing displaced local tenants, it heralded the start of a new policy to give the working class a 'fair go' in the inner city.

Community Renewal – 1990s

A housing boom that lasted most of the decade made both buying or privately renting a property less and less affordable in Sydney, which had the highest purchase and rental prices in Australia. Consequently, demand for public housing rose while both Commonwealth and State funding declined in real terms.

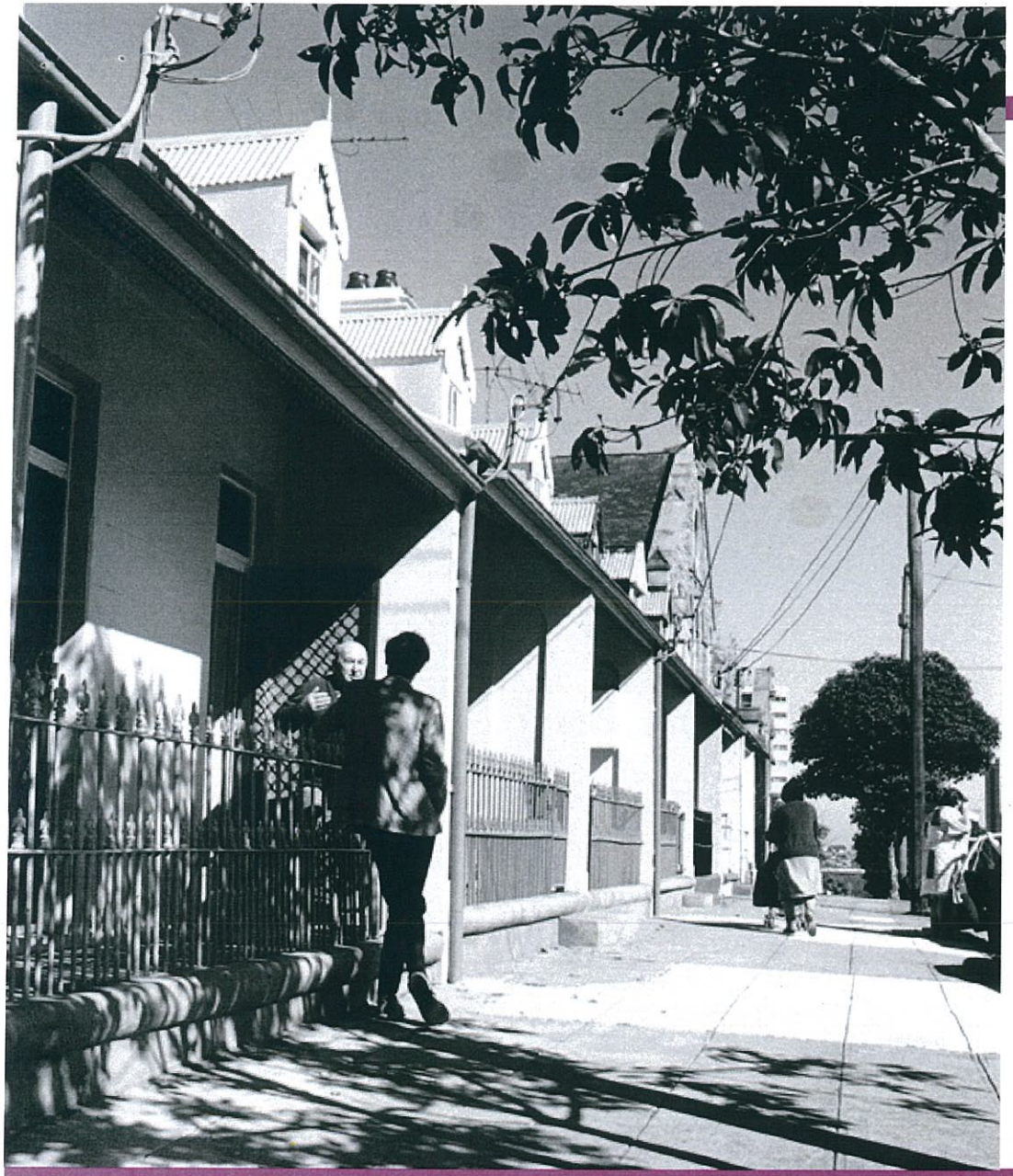
This required the Department of Housing to explore new and innovative strategies in the private purchase and rental sectors. Innovations such as headleasing (the rental and subletting of property from the private sector) and partnerships with community housing organisations, saw the stock of community housing double in five years – an important supplement to public housing.

However, the big theme of the past decade was the ongoing work of the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP) which evolved into Community Renewal. Some concentrated communities of disadvantage with high unemployment, little formal education, low incomes, welfare dependency, poor health, physical isolation, antisocial and criminal activity and limited personal and family support were identified. These were mostly in the great and corridor estates built in earlier eras. The cumulative effect of this chronic disadvantage led to the exclusion of some communities from many opportunities available to others. While the root causes of disadvantage were outside the control of the public housing sector, the Department of Housing sought to address these issues through an expanding program of Community Renewal.

The NIP program began in 1994. Its aim was to help reduce the high levels of disadvantage and social exclusion experienced in the housing estates where 33% of tenants live. A massive ongoing physical refurbishment program began in the most marginalised estates like Airds, Macquarie Fields and other locations. The refurbishment and reorientation of Radburn-designed properties to face roadways, providing of new roads, improvement of security measures and landscaping of common areas all helped to improve the quality of the physical environment.

Since 1998 the work of the Neighbourhood Improvement Program has been augmented by an expanding network of Intensive Tenancy Management (ITMs). This recognised that social development was as important as physical refurbishment in the process of community renewal. ITMs are Department of Housing outposts in the heart of the most problematic areas. Permanent staff are placed *in situ* to establish closer rapport with tenants and help target and rectify problems specific to that estate.

The aim of Community Renewal is to break public housing stereotypes by



Community Renewal – 1990s

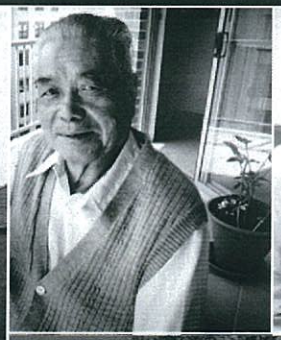
making the estates look more like nearby suburbs. This is done by improving infrastructure and regenerating homes and communal areas. It also aims to encourage a better social mix of public housing and private tenants by the strategic disposal of properties in certain suburbs and engendering a sense of community by giving residents a say in how their neighbourhood is managed.

Particular attention was given to better defining client needs, improving service delivery and achieving better rapport with tenants and support services through Neighbourhood Advisory Boards. The overall aim of Community Renewal is embodied in the current Department of Housing vision statement, *"...A healthy housing system that provides sustainable, affordable housing for NSW and supports individuals and neighbourhoods to create vibrant, sustainable communities".*

More recently Drug Action Teams, partnerships with police and other government agencies, clean-up and graffiti busting days and tenant newsletters have all been introduced to help reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. This program enabled the estates to better integrate with surrounding neighbourhoods. Through the strategic disposal of properties it is hoped to progressively achieve a better social mix. The *Greening the Community* project initiated a statewide network of community gardens, which has proved a great success in helping foster a sense of community, improve the environment and the overall quality of life.

Unemployment is a major factor in the feeling of social exclusion on estates. Current statistics show that only 27% of public housing tenants get their main income source from somewhere other than social security and some 96% of tenants receive some form of benefit. In response, the Department of Housing has initiated a number of training and employment programs to not only provide work opportunities and experience, but also to build community pride. Community contracts have seen the Department employ tenants as contractors to do various landscaping, maintenance and cleaning jobs and help tenants set up their own small businesses and co-operatives.

The physical refurbishment program and deployment of staff to the most troubled estates have paid dividends. By the end of the decade giant strides were made in winning back community confidence in the Department of Housing. The millions of dollars spent on redevelopment and refurbishment is resulting in an increasing number of housing opportunities being created each year and rising levels of tenant satisfaction.



2000 and Beyond

Sixty years after its inception, the Department of Housing is an integral part of the social and physical landscape in New South Wales. It is now the biggest landlord in Australia with around 130,000 properties and some 310,000 tenants. The short but eventful history of public housing in New South Wales has demonstrated that social demands on housing have never remained constant. If they had, then an effective solution to housing problems might have proved easier to find. But in a dynamic society where social, economic and political pressures can change overnight, the Department of Housing will have to continue to embrace constant evolutionary change to meet ever more complex needs. However, the wealth of knowledge and experience that has been accumulated over the past sixty years mean that the New South Wales Department of Housing is well placed to deliver housing solutions to the people of New South Wales.

The policy of Community Renewal has continued into the 21st century. Now in its second decade, there has been a tangible improvement in life on estates through the various employment, environmental and training initiatives. Since Community Renewal began in 1994 the Department of Housing has spent some $150 million on redevelopment and refurbishment of estates and has recently expanded its network of ITMs. This has resulted in a general rise in the levels of client satisfaction with both the Department's service and their environment.

The typical Department of Housing client profile has changed dramatically in the past 60 years from blue-collar workers to mostly disadvantaged people with myriad special needs.

Today, nearly 90% of tenants are in receipt of some form of benefit or pension; 21% are sole parent families; 26% are frail aged people; while 29% are people with special needs such as people with a disability.

The Department of Housing has responded to the challenge by readapting existing properties or building new purpose-built units and, when those needs are "beyond shelter", forming partnerships with other government agencies to provide the necessary supports.

This has all been achieved in the face of a booming property market in Sydney that has caused a sharp rise in the cost of property and land during the past decade. The Department of Housing has continued to grow new housing opportunities by expanding partnerships with the private and community housing sectors. The Department also helps clients to help themselves. Through the Mortgage Assistance and RentStart schemes the Department assists clients to become homeowners or enter the private rental market.

There will always be people with accommodation needs and in the 21st century the Department of Housing will continue to respond effectively to changing needs so that tenants have a decent place to live, feel secure and can enjoy some degree of housing choice.

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